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SUBJECT: CLIMATE CHANGE: UN AGENCIES DESCRIBE CHALLENGES TO A/S
BRIMMER

¶1. SUMMARY: Mission Geneva organized an event on May 5 to discuss climate change, taking advantage of the visit of Assistant Secretary Esther Brimmer. Guests to the event, who had been selected on the basis of their involvement in threading climate change concerns into their home organization's agenda, spoke to the need for better messaging that would address the cross-cutting nature of climate change adaptation and mitigation. Earlier in the day, Brimmer met with the WMO Secretary General regarding the World Climate Conference 3 and reform initiatives. END SUMMARY.

Climate Change - a Geneva Perspective

¶2. International Organizations A/S Brimmer, during a two-day orientation visit to Geneva on May 4 and 5 (septels), stressed that she was in listening mode, which included an evening with key actors from Geneva-based organizations involved in climate change. Guests included Bjorn Stigson, President of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development; Secretary General Michel Jarraud of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO); William Jackson, Deputy Director General of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Ivar Baste, Director of the Environment Management Secretariat for UNEP; Maria Neira, Climate and Health Director for the World Health Organization (WHO), Mohammed Mukhier, Head of Disaster Policy and Preparedness Department for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), and Malcolm Johnson, Director of the Telecommunication Standardization Bureau at the International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

¶3. The discussion ranged from the real politick view of Stigson who advises the German, Chinese and the U.S. governments on climate change mitigation to Neira's innovative ideas for getting the public at large and the private sector behind mitigation efforts. Stigson said that China aspires to a low carbon economy for energy security and to mitigate the destabilizing effects of climate change on rural areas that are particularly vulnerable to draught. He went on to say that the U.S. and China are in a parallel situation needing to sort out their domestic situations before they can move forward.

¶4. WHO's Neira proffered a more positive vision. She stated that people could be motivated to move forward on climate change mitigation if it is tied to a good public health campaign. I.E., climate change mitigation is good for you and your children because it reduces chronic vascular disease, respiratory illness, asthma, and other diseases. Neira called this a "no-regrets investment;" meaning that climate change mitigation is health insurance for society at large. Clean cooking stoves that reduce black carbon emissions and indoor air pollution would be one example of a good joint initiative. She also noted that hospitals and clinics could lead by example by reducing their institutional carbon footprint.

¶5. According to Johnson's (ITU) read-out, efficiencies in hospitals and clinics may not be that hard to capture. ITU recently completed a full life cycle analysis and standardized methodology for measuring the carbon footprint of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Johnson stated that ICTs contribute

approximately 3 percent of greenhouse gas emissions - about the same as air transportation. If improved ICTs were fully integrated into society (for example, in hospitals) the efficiencies gained could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 15 percent from current levels by 2020. Johnson made the point that in Europe alone there were 100 million cell phone users who replace their phones annually.

IUCN's Jackson concurred that the private sector would have to lead on climate change solutions and echoed Neira's call for linking climate change and health, noting the steady creep of tick borne diseases into new areas. He also made a case for addressing land use changes, particularly deforestation and forest degradation, which would improve livelihoods as well as sequester carbon.

¶6. Jarraud reminded our State colleagues that even if all greenhouse gas emissions were to cease tomorrow, climate change will persist for the next 500 years; which is why adaptation as well as mitigation is essential. He made the point that we can no longer look to the past as a model for the future. Decision makers determining where to build a dam cannot depend on past hydrological data to determine the best location, he said. He added that at this point 500 year floods may occur every few years, and seasonal rains may shift all together. IFRC's Mukhier underscored that people just are not prepared for unexpected weather - they do not know how to plan for or react to floods in dry areas or draughts in wet areas. He said that IFRC's responses to disasters due to extreme weather events are increasing but they do not necessarily garner press attention. "This is bigger than any one organization," according to Mukhier. He urges UN and non-UN actors to sit together and "work on analyses and conclusions to deal with these humanitarian crises on the ground."

WMO and the WCC3

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¶7. Brimmer met with WMO Secretary General Jarraud earlier in the day to discuss progress on the World Climate Conference 3 (WCC3). He explained the role of the WMO and the proposed outcome of the WCC3 - a "Global Framework on Climate Services" in relation to the upcoming UNFCCC COP 15. WMO has a role in mitigation as it can monitor the geographic spread and levels of greenhouse gas emissions which will be essential for assessing the implementation of COP 15 outcomes. Jarraud also explained the critical need to disseminate accurate weather predictions to decision makers in all socio-economic sectors so that they can make critical resource choices in adapting to climate change; WMO's Global Framework could be key to helping the most vulnerable communities adapt to climate change.

¶8. When the conversation turned to management issues, Jarraud emphasized that his goal in implementing reform practices is to make a more efficient and responsive organization. Having completed 80 percent of the auditors' recommendations, he expected that further reform would proceed at a slower pace, though he ruefully commented that despite his hope that WMO would not be on the leading edge of implementing IPSAS, it seemed that WMO was on schedule for implementation while other UN organizations were beginning to lag behind. Finally, Jarraud wholeheartedly thanked Brimmer for delivering the letter informing him of the USG contribution of USD 500,000 towards WCC3 and noted that it was "good to know U.S. priorities, because then we can say: OK, how can we help." Mission subsequently issued a press release announcing the USG contribution.

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